



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

OUR MISSION IN NICARAGUA

BY CHARLES A. CONANT

To many who have not followed closely the ramifications of American diplomacy with the different nations of the earth, the question has perhaps arisen why the United States at the present time should be interesting herself so actively in Central America as to send there her highest executive officer below the President—the Secretary of State. To those familiar with the true conditions, however, the answer to this query is that the United States must interest herself in the maintenance of order and security for life and property, unless she wishes one or more of the leading powers of Europe to intervene. This might mean conflict over the Monroe Doctrine and the assumption of a protectorate by either the United States or a great European power at the threshold of the Panama Canal.

At present American diplomatic influence is being exerted in certain countries of Central America to permit their people to establish such conditions of security and peace as will avoid the necessity of direct interference either by this country or any other. It was to explain our purposes in this respect that Secretary Knox went on his mission of peace and good will to Latin America. It requires actual contact with these peoples to realize how different are their political and social conditions from those of the United States and Western Europe. In the absence of genuine economic development through the use of labor-saving machinery and the orderly, uninterrupted labor of the masses in building homes, investing their savings, and adding to the common fund of wealth, the chief means of acquiring riches quickly is by spoliation. In too many cases the man without scruples who could once grasp the Presidency of one of these countries has been able to keep it by force over a term of years sufficient for him to extort millions from the

sweat and suffering of the laboring masses and transfer it to Europe for safe-keeping, until at length the accumulating discontent of those whom he has robbed, and the ambition of others to follow in his footsteps, have compelled him to flit across the ocean, and spend his ill-gotten accumulations in those forms of sensuous vulgarity which represent the chief type of enjoyment to the man without ideals.

It has been thus over and over again in the Southern countries with the Guzman Blancos, the Castros, and the Zelayas of recent years. The evil they have done has had ramifications moral, social, and economic. From the moral point of view, the example has been held out to other unscrupulous adventurers to follow in the same path of spoliation, government by force, and neglect of the honest means of acquiring wealth. From the social point of view, both the classes and the masses have been discouraged from any ambition except that of living by public plunder. Long years of tyranny have bred a fever in the blood, which can only be allayed by other years of quiet discipline in better government. From the economic point of view, there has existed practically the same evil as that of absentee landlordism—that the wealth of the country has been sucked away to be spent in vicious and unproductive luxury in a foreign land. From the fact of robbery of the rich by the tyrant of the moment has come also to the capitalist complete discouragement from the creation of new industries, while to the masses has come the dangerous lesson, that it was as contemptible as it was useless to expend their efforts in honest labor, when they could profit more by joining a revolution and acquiring a military or civil post.

On every hand in Nicaragua are evidences of former years of misgovernment and spoliation. Roads full of gullies, almost impassable except by ox-carts, form the thoroughfares between leading cities. A large producer of milk for the capital, with his ranch close to the Lake of Managua, when asked why he did not send in his product by a steam-launch instead of by ox-carts, replied that if he put a launch on the lake it would be seized at the first outbreak of revolution, either by the government or the revolutionists, and would either be lost entirely to the owner or come back in too dilapidated a condition for further use. The breeding of fine horses has been given over for similar reasons—that whenever revolutionary disturbances break

out, the ranches are raided and the horses taken for the regular army or that of the revolutionists. Even with the cattle it is much the same. A marauding band of troops will kill them for the meat and leave the carcasses for the vultures.

Such money-making opportunities in Nicaragua as emerged above the storm-clouded horizon of civil war were seized upon by President Zelaya and his followers as sources of personal profit. Leases of the liquor and tobacco industries were made, at small compensation to the government, to joint-stock companies, in which the President of the Republic or his dummy held big blocks of shares. The railway was leased to a separate company, which created a paper capital of \$1,200,000 without the investment of a penny, and handed over about a third of the shares to the public-spirited President who had granted the lease. Many minor monopolies were handled in the same manner. Special piers were authorized at certain ports, which importers were compelled to use, in order that heavy wharf charges might be divided up between the original promoters and the powers at the capital. When some of the merchants at Bluefields, many of whom are Americans, asked for a revision of the tariff upon certain necessities of life, the dictator politely intimated that he had little use for foreigners, and that there were plenty of steamers leaving Bluefields which they could take if they did not like the government. He graciously condescended, however, to promise a revision, which, when it reached Bluefields, proved to be in the nature of a grim joke—duties being reduced on a short list of such vital necessities as castor oil and pepper, without touching important articles of large importation.

Government like this in the Southern countries has rested upon force, and a force which was not exercised with skilful tact by the gloved hand, as in the Rome of Augustus or the Antonines, but with the crude brutality of the tyrant who every moment fears assassination by the husband he has wronged or rebellion by the rival who envies his power and opportunities. The power of President Zelaya, who governed Nicaragua from 1893 to 1909, rested upon the loyalty of the soldiers. A few hundred in each of the leading cities were enough to maintain his authority in the absence of organization and monetary help to his opponents from abroad. Even under the present more lenient government

of President Diaz, the fixed bayonet and the loaded musket are necessary badges of authority and order. A garrison looks down upon the capital, Managua, with loaded machine-guns ready to fire at a moment's notice upon the thoughtless villager or tourist who comes too near them after dark without a password. The fever of militarism in its crudest and most wasteful form has been infused into the blood by years of tyranny and disorder. Although the Nicaraguan army has been reduced to 1,600 men, the rattle of drums, the parade of detachments through the streets, and the presence until recently of files of soldiers at the Government Palaces indicate how completely government rests upon force.

Since the American intervention against Zelaya in 1909 some of these visible symbols of military rule have been disappearing under the helpful suggestions of Mr. Gunther, the brilliant young American who was until recently *Chargé d'Affaires* at Managua, and with the co-operation of President Diaz and General Luis Mena, the Minister of War. The rifle-slots with which Zelaya perforated the heavy cement walls of his fortress at the Campo de Marte, on the outskirts of Managua, have been filled up. Policemen are being substituted for soldiers about the public buildings, and the citizens of Grenada are urging the abandonment of the barracks in the heart of the city which form the hateful symbol of Zelaya's long tyranny. But these things can only be done with safety under the friendly influence of America. Every one knows that neither the authority of President Diaz nor that of any one who might be chosen in his place would endure for a week, unassailed by the plotters of revolution, if it was not supported by force visible and tangible or by the overshadowing power of the United States.

Men who opposed Zelaya were robbed of their property and driven into exile. The power of the love of home, however, and the disposition to labor and save even under the most adverse conditions, were well illustrated by the history of the city of Grenada during these years of terror. One of the most prosperous commercial cities of Nicaragua, the heir of a long line of Spanish history and traditions, Grenada was called by Zelaya the "rebellious city" and the "accursed city." Again and again, when he needed money, a notice went to a Grenada merchant, a member of

one of the few old families who are the center of the city's life, that he must produce 50,000 or 100,000 pesos within two or three days. On some occasions the demand was enforced by a cordon of soldiers directed to prevent ingress or egress from the house or the delivery of food until the demand was complied with. One of Zelaya's last official decrees (September 17, 1909), frankly announcing a forced loan of 1,000,000 pesos by its name (*imprestito fuerza*), allotted 400,000 pesos to the Department of Grenada, and only 100,000 to each of the other two chief departments—Managua, the capital, and Leon, where the partisans of Zelaya predominated. By Article 3 of this decree the civil head of the city was instructed to notify the "lenders" of their allotment within four days, and by Article 4 to require them to pay in half their quota within three days and the other half within eight days more.

When the citizens of Grenada refused to make Zelaya honorary president of their best club, he broke up the club and confiscated its house. When they held a masked ball, his soldiers dispersed the merry-makers at the point of the pistol. When the city showed undue signs of prosperity, he tore up the tramway. No wonder that in Grenada and elsewhere exist sickness of heart and weariness of spirit over the possibility of these recurring reigns of terrorism, and the hope, often openly expressed, that American influence may be exercised, in some such form as that exercised over Cuba under the Platt Amendment, in order that the long-stunted flowers of peace and order may thrive and blossom.

The United States and European countries are not free from exploitation and dishonest government. But one of the great differences between these advanced commercial countries and those of the South is, that in the Northern countries the enormous productive power of organized industry makes an occasional injustice on the part of the capitalist or government a negligible factor in the progress of the country. Even the millions which are poured out for military and naval purposes in the Northern countries are only the small tribute which productive industry pays for protection; in the South they are the be-all and end-all of those who rely upon force to consummate their ends. Where a laborer can earn only a few cents a day, and has no inducement to work except precariously, he has little

for paying tribute to the higher powers. To take from him much of what he has brings him close to the margin of starvation. Measured by the standards of the Northern countries, the monetary acquisitions of a Castro or a Zelaya, which they have taken out of the country, are insignificant; but in the Northern countries the evolution of eight centuries of civilization has given the assurance that, in spite of occasional wrongs or a heavy burden of taxation, there exist security of property, the right of uninterrupted labor and saving, and protection for life, liberty, and freedom of contract under the ægis of law. In the Northern countries the great amounts taken by taxation are given back to the people in improved roads, deepened harbors, postal facilities, pure water supplies, systems of drainage, hospitals, schools, police and sanitary protection, and even insurance against poverty in old age. In those Southern countries which have submitted to tyrannies like that of Zelaya, roads go unimproved, harbors are closed by the silting of the river sands over the bars, railways fall out of repair, the post-office and the telegraph languish under incompetent administration, and drainage and sanitary precautions are almost unknown.

It is not surprising that under governments like these national bankruptcy, the wreckage of currency systems, the violation of public faith, and shattered national credit have been the rule. In such a condition Nicaragua found herself when at last Zelaya surrendered his power. Many Americans probably rubbed their eyes with astonishment when they read the note addressed by Secretary Knox to the Nicaraguan Government on December 1, 1909, after the murder of the two Americans, Cannon and Groce, by Zelaya's soldiers. The murdered men were more or less adventurers who took the chances of their calling, but Zelaya's long reign of tyranny had at last come to be understood in its true colors at Washington and in the cabinets of Europe. Petty insults to the American Legation had been increasing in frequency. The mail of the Legation was opened and held back; telegrams were deliberately altered; fines were imposed upon men wearing buttons bearing the American flag; and upon the news of the election of President Taft in 1908, a party of Americans and Nicaraguans who met to celebrate the event was broken up, and its chief Nicaraguan members were subjected to jail

and torture. Minister Coolidge a few days later threw up his commission, declaring that it was "consistent with neither the dignity nor the interests of the United States to maintain a representative" in such a land, where the only rule was that of force.

Still the patient "mules" of the North—the pet name for Americans among their enemies in Central America—were silently submissive. But upon the organization of a strong revolutionary movement on the East Coast, Secretary Knox felt that the time had come to aid the Nicaraguan people by at least refusing longer recognition of the tyrant. Sending his passports to Felipe Rodriguez, the Nicaraguan representative in Washington, he advised him that it was "a matter of common knowledge that under the régime of President Zelaya republican institutions have ceased in Nicaragua to exist except in name; that public opinion and the press have been throttled; and that prison has been the reward of any tendency to real patriotism." Upon receipt of news of this note Zelaya realized at last that his day was over. He knew that his few thousand ill-disciplined and poorly equipped native soldiers could make no stand against the jackies from American war-ships if they landed at Corinto, and that their path to the capital was likely to be a prolonged ovation from a liberated people. Fearing assassination by his enemies, he took a special train at an obscure station outside Managua, slunk away to the seaport, and was there received by the officers of a Mexican gunboat, sent by his sympathetic fellow-ruler who was so soon to follow him into political oblivion.

It was following these events that the United States felt justified in extending advice to the new government of Nicaragua to enter upon a policy of financial and political rehabilitation. Ultimately this advice was accepted. Zelaya turned over the Presidency to a former friend, Dr. Madriz, but his government was short-lived. General Estrada succeeded to the Presidency, but an attempt on his part in May, 1911, to undermine the power of General Mena, his Minister of War, resulted in another change of government. Mena had command of the troops whose menacing machine-guns looked down upon the city of Managua. In a moment when he was away from the barracks, President Estrada put him under arrest and directed the soldiers to lay down their arms and accept a

new commander. The soldiers remained loyal to Mena, and upon this news Estrada followed the course of so many of his predecessors in seeking safety across the frontier. General Mena, however, did not insist upon the Presidency. His friend, Adolfo Diaz, took the position and left Mena at his post as Minister of War.

Señor Diaz is a young man, trained in mercantile enterprises at Bluefields on the East Coast, where he has imbibed American ideas of the value of order and business enterprise. General Mena, of stature much above the ordinary in Nicaragua, bluff, sturdy, reticent, combines with many of the traditions of the soldier an insight into the real needs of his country which has made him a resolute friend of the American loan. Upon his adherence to this attitude, in spite perhaps of some sacrifices of popularity and of personal following, and upon similar loyalty by the big business interests of Grenada and Leon, rests in a large measure the immediate future of Nicaragua.

Even before the fall of Estrada, the Government of Nicaragua had asked the United States to designate a competent specialist to investigate its financial affairs and arrange for a loan to extinguish its debts and to meet accumulating claims. The delicate mission of reconciling political jealousies fell upon Thomas C. Dawson, of long experience as an American diplomat in Latin America, and the study of the financial problem upon Mr. Ernest H. Wands, an expert of much experience in Latin-American affairs. The Government asked also that the currency standard should be lifted from the quicksand of paper which had been issued by all the governments since 1893 and put upon a stable basis. Inevitably the arrangement suggested itself which has been so successful in San Domingo—that a loan should be made by American bankers to the Republic, secured by the direct collection of the customs. Such a loan has been offered by two well-known banking-houses of New York. The total of the loan, if original plans are carried to completion, will be about \$15,000,000. Of this amount several millions will go to extinguishing old obligations, both foreign and domestic, about \$1,500,000 to the establishment of a bank and the reform of the currency, and the remainder to building railways and developing the rich natural resources of this long-suffering country. Already the amount required for giving stability to the cur-

rency has been advanced, and Nicaragua will soon be on an effective gold basis.

At present a single railroad about 115 miles in length runs from Corinto, on the coast, to Grenada, close by the Lake of Nicaragua. The coffee plantations in the higher districts, the gold mines of the East Coast, the rubber forests, the banana plantations, and the great expanses of hard woods are practically untapped by railroad communication or even by good roads. With stable government and a sound currency, foreign capital is likely to flow into Nicaragua in the same manner that it has flowed into Costa Rica under the encouragement of the United Fruit Company and other American and European enterprises. Great is the contrast between economic and social conditions in Costa Rica, with those of Nicaragua, her northern neighbor. In Costa Rica good roads, the improvement of harbors, reasonably adequate banking facilities, the steady employment of labor, the continuous sovereignty of law and order, and the contentment of the people are the fruits of good government and the encouragement of foreign enterprise.

In Nicaragua, after nearly a generation of misgovernment, protection against enemies of peace at home can come only under the advice and support of America. Otherwise, however good a single government may be, it must maintain itself by force, and is likely to be at any moment the victim of a greater force, promising greater rewards in spoliation and dishonest opportunity to its followers. It is the cry of those who love peace, order, and safety for property, liberty, and life which rises loudest for the assistance and support of the United States in maintaining good government. To the great Republic whose power is symbolized by the Stars and Stripes, they utter in effect, the prayer of Horace to Augustus after he had brought peace to the blood-weary Roman world:

"When you are here the ox plods up and down the fields in safety; Ceres and bounteous blessing cheer our farms; our sailors speed o'er seas that know no fear of pirates; credit is unimpaired; no foul adulteries stain the home; punishment follows hard on crime. . . . Each man closes a day of peace on his native hills, trains his vines to the widowed trees, and home returning, light of heart, quaffs his wine and ends the feast with blessings on thee as a god indeed."

CHARLES A. CONANT.